

**EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: THE EFFECTS OF ROLE-PLAY  
ON SELF-CONCEPT AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

**by**

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## ABSTRAK

### PEMBELAJARAN MELALUI PENGALAMAN: KESAN MAIN PERANAN KE ATAS KONSEP KENDIRI DAN KECEKAPAN KOMUNIKASI

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat sama ada pelajar-pelajar yang melalui pendekatan main peranan dalam sesi pengajaran percakapan merasa perubahan dalam aspek konsep sendiri dan kecekapan komunikasi di antara tempoh waktu pra-ujian dan pasca-ujian berbanding pelajar-pelajar yang melalui pendekatan pengajaran secara tradisional yang berpusatkan guru. Tujuan yang kedua ialah untuk menentukan sama ada perubahan yang berlaku pada konsep diri para pelajar berkadar terus dengan perubahan yang berlaku pada kecekapan komunikasi. Dua kumpulan sampel yang terdiri daripada 59 orang pelajar Semester 2 Diploma Sains di UiTM Perlis telah dipilih menyertai eksperimen. Mereka ialah 27 pelajar bagi kumpulan eksperimen dan 32 pelajar bagi kumpulan kawalan. Kajian ini dilaksanakan selama 14 minggu atau 1 semester pengajian di UiTM. Dua ujian lisan berformatkan ujian lisan MUET dan dua ujian konsep sendiri (Multi-dimensional Test of Self-concept) dijalankan dalam bentuk pra-ujian di peringkat awal kajian sebelum pengajaran dimulakan dan pasca-ujian di peringkat akhir kajian. Sepuluh sesi pengajaran dan pembelajaran (p & p) dilaksanakan ke atas kedua-dua kumpulan: kumpulan eksperimen didedahkan kepada pendekatan main peranan yang bersandarkan konsep pembelajaran melalui pengalaman, manakala kumpulan kawalan melalui pendekatan kelas tradisional berpusatkan guru. Data kajian dikumpul melalui ujian lisan pra dan pasca, ujian inventori konsep sendiri pra dan pasca, pemerhatian tingkah laku pelajar semasa pelaksanaan 10 sesi p & p, serta temubual separa berstruktur kepada pelajar-pelajar kumpulan eksperimen dan kumpulan kawalan. Selain itu, pelajar-pelajar dalam kumpulan eksperimen juga diperlukan menulis jurnal setiap minggu berkenaan perasaan, dapatan dan perubahan yang berlaku pada diri mereka setiap kali sesi main peranan dijalankan. Analisis data telah dijalankan menggunakan Pakej Statistik bagi Sains Sosial (SPSS)

versi 11.5. Dapatan menunjukkan yang pelajar-pelajar dari kedua-dua kumpulan eksperimen dan kawalan mengalami perubahan dari aspek konsep sendiri dan kecekapan komunikasi, tetapi skor min bagi kumpulan eksperimen menunjukkan perbezaan yang lebih tinggi bagi kedua-dua konsep sendiri dan kecekapan komunikasi berbanding dengan kumpulan kawalan. Dapatan dari pemerhatian, temubual dan penulisan jurnal juga menyokong keputusan ini. Selain itu, ujian korelasi *Pearson* menunjukkan perubahan yang berlaku pada konsep sendiri pelajar adalah berhubung kait dengan kecekapan komunikasi mereka.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: THE EFFECTS OF ROLE-PLAY ON SELF-CONCEPT AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

This study attempts to investigate whether learners who are exposed to experiential learning form of role-play experience a change in self-concept and oral competence than those who are exposed to the traditional teacher-fronted approach. Another focus of the study is to determine whether there is parallelism between the changes that occur in self-concept and the changes that occur in oral competence. Two groups of Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Perlis Diploma in Science Semester 2 students were selected as the subjects for the study. There were 27 students for the experimental group and 32 students for the control group. The study was carried out over a course of 14 weeks and began with the oral proficiency (speaking) test, which was administered as a pre-test for both groups prior to any teaching of speaking component. Ten sessions of speaking lessons were conducted with both groups; the experimental group adopted role-play whereas the control group underwent the traditional teacher-centred approach. The data were gathered through speaking pre-test and post-test, pre-test and post-test of Multi-dimensional Test of Self-concept (MTS), on-going observations and pre and post semi-structured interview with learners of both groups. However, learners of the experimental group had an extra task, which required them to record their feelings, findings and improvements in journal entries. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.5 was used to analyse the speaking and MTS tests. The results revealed that learners of both groups registered changes in self-concept and oral competence. However, learners of the experimental group attained higher and more significant changes in self-concept and oral competence than those of the control group. Likewise, observations and interviews conducted with both groups and journal entries submitted by the experimental samples supported the outcomes. Furthermore, Pearson correlation test reveals that there is correlation between the changes in self-

concept and oral competence due to the use of experiential form of role-play as a learning process.

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## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

The Cabinet Committee Report on the Review of the Implementation of the Education Policy 1979 states that the teaching of English is to enable all school-leavers to use English in certain everyday situations and work situations. Hence, the English Language Syllabus, for many years since then, has emphasised on the need to equip students with the ability to communicate orally. They are required to speak internationally intelligible English with correct pronunciation and intonation (p.1). However, being orally competent in the second language has always been a far-fetched dream among most of the students. An article in the New Straits Times by Dr Leslie Foo, dated March 8, 2002 reported that:

Many Malaysians have long expressed concern over the poor results in English ... and the lack of English proficiency and self-confidence among graduates, public servants and even some diplomats.

A letter, written by Zarshik, which was addressed to the Editor and published on May 15, 2002 grieved the standard of communicative competence among graduates:

While interviewing candidates, I came across a graduate who had A1 for English at SPM level but whose conversational skills were atrocious. The candidate may be able to write in English to perfection but could not speak the language well. So, generally, Malaysians (graduates) understand English but cannot speak it well.

The former Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed himself urged all government departments and agencies to conduct English courses for their staff as:

The Government was worried about the language proficiency of the 190,000-strong civil servants, which posed a threat to the country's competitiveness (p.2)

Despite the countless efforts by teachers to help students come out of their shells and become more confident in conversing in the target language, the

phenomenon of students lacking in oral communicative competence remains a problem nationwide.

In addressing the issue, we need to find the root cause of the problem and find ways and alternatives to resolve it. In line with the shift in the field of language teaching and learning, which focuses more on learners and learning rather than teachers and teaching, some room have been allocated for the development of communicative ability alongside the acquisition of language. Rivers & Temperly (1978) postulate that pseudo-communication activities, which provide opportunities for communication in simulated situations are needed to gear students towards development of confidence and reliance to overcome 'hurdles' in communication.

Such 'hurdles' exist due to the insufficient attention given to the enhancement of communicative ability. Role-play, which used to be a helping activity in developing communicative ability in the 1970s has been showing signs of losing its popularity, Brumfit (1984) thinks it is only suitable for short courses and for intermediate and advanced adults or adolescents but not an item that can be utilised in the long-term language programme. Hence, such activities that can enhance communicative ability must be looked into: what to be done and how to get it done. The teacher has to take the responsibility to create a condition in which he/she is full of enthusiasm about teaching the oral skills of the target language, which in turn will make the students active and extrovert.

Such environment needs to include activities, which require learners to go beyond texts. Activities like simulation and role-play will encourage students to think creatively as to how they can make role-play an enjoyable and fun activity, develop social and behavioural skills as they need to interact and negotiate with others and practise the target language, which will give room to motivation and involvement to be created for learning to occur.

The cycles of learning which each student will need to go through is Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle – 'learning by doing' which allows them to actively

involve themselves in the role play, reflect on it, conceptualise and actively expand on what has been reflected and conceptualised.

The experiential learning concept by Kolb is essential in this study due to its theory that defines the cognitive processes of learning and asserts the importance of critical reflection in learning (Kelly, 2000), giving a leeway to students to apply the knowledge outside the classroom and their own experiences into the activities (Krish, 2001).

## **1.1 Background of the Study**

### **1.1.1 The Decline in the Use of Role-play**

The shift that has taken place in the field of language learning and teaching as mentioned earlier has urged for more learner-centred activities and one of the teaching methods is experiential learning which is drawn from the early works of John Dewey (1938), Kurt Lewin (1951) and Jean Piaget (1970). Little of role-play as a form of experiential learning has been practised lately, though. Hence, this study will look into the effectiveness and feasibility of role-play despite the disinterest of many scholars in the field of role-play.

Taylor (1982) and Piper (1984) claim that their students found role-play situations contrived and un compelling, lacking in 'real reality'. Surplus (1986), though, agreeable to role-play noticed 'role-play resistance syndrome' in her students. Worse, Smith (1986) concludes that role-play is easier said than done. Putting it into practice has not been as effective as how it sounds in theory.

According to Al-Arishi (1994), role-play is losing out to other more favoured Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) activities like dyad, triad, and small group work, tasks involving language-based realia or pictures, language games, brainstorming, problem-solving tasks, process-oriented activities and also structure-based grammar exercises. But, what probes me into studying the feasibility of role-

play as an enhancer to communicative ability is that role-play can also be done in dyad, triad and also small group and some of the role-play situations do involve brainstorming and problem solving. It is hoped that the merger of these activities will help in the advancement of the studied learners' communicative ability.

The same phenomenon occurs in Universiti Teknologi Mara, which during the 1990s adopted role-play as a form of teaching and testing speaking skills for two of the English papers, ENL110 (Foundation English One) and ENL120 (Foundation English One for the School of Applied Science) while ENL054 (English for Pre-Commerce) called for a few communication activities i.e. language games, public speaking, and story-telling in enhancing the use of communication skills. Of late, it has been ruled out and no longer part of the syllabus of any papers due to the need for the university to prepare students for MUET paper which requires rigid forum-like speaking presentation.

Experiential learning is not only “work” or “praxis” (the connecting of learning to real life situations), it is also a theory that defines the cognitive processes of learning (Kelly, 2000). Not only that, the essence of experiential learning is it asserts the importance of critical reflection in learning. Experiential learning is the learning in which students are doing something – not just thinking about something. The experiential learning cycle integrates 1) concrete experiences, 2) reflective observations about the experiences, 3) generalisations about experiences and observations (abstract conceptualisations), and 4) active experimentations with the abstract concepts (Kolb, 1984). The greatest learning will occur when the learning is grounded in experience and goes through the four phases of the learning cycle. Therefore, it is of help to adopt experiential learning form of role-play as a means to improve learners' self-concept and communicative ability. In the early 1980s, Mezirow, Freire and others stressed that the heart of learning lies in the way we process experience, in other words, our critical reflection of experience. They spoke of learning as a cycle that begins with experience, continues with reflection and later

leads to action, which itself becomes a concrete experience for reflection (Rogers, 1996).

### 1.1.2 Role-play as an Experiential Learning Process

Kolb (1984) claims that experiential learning offers foundation for an approach to education and learning as a lifelong process. Beard & Wilson (2002) assert that the relevant experience gathered in simulation and role-play at any time may increase motivation and facilitate subsequent learning. For example, a teacher might have an encounter with an angry student who had failed a test. This is the 'experience.' His effort to try explain it to himself by comparing it to previous experiences to determine what is the same and what is unique, analysing it according to personal and institutional standards, and formulating a course of action connected to the experiences of others, by talking to other teachers who had experienced similar situation is what we call 'reflection'. Discussion amongst the class that have experienced role-play contributes further insights and alternative ways of looking at the problem discussed in the activity. Kolb further refined the concept of reflection by dividing it into two separate learning activities, perceiving and processing (Algonquin, 1996).

He, then, added another stage, called 'abstract conceptualisation.' At the earlier stage we enquire about the experience in terms of previous experiences, at this stage we try to find the answers. We make generalisations, draw conclusions and form hypotheses about the experience. At the 'active experimentation' stage, the hypotheses are tried out.

The process of learning from an experiential exercise is as follows:

Experience > Debrief > Generalisation > Application  
 (concrete) (reflection) (conceptualisation) (active experimentation)

1. Experience: The participants are led in an activity that is fun and stimulating.



2. Debrief: A discussion follows the experience. This discussion helps participants identify and analyse what they can learn, have learnt or experienced from the events that have just transpired.
3. Generalisation: Participants identify improvements to be made and how and what they learn may be applicable in other situations.
4. Application: Participants identify related situations where they can use what they learn. We provide coaching to help participants be accountable for using the learning out of class.

Hereto, the power of conversation in learning and making meaning interactive is being recognized. Yet, the theoretical foundation for experiential learning at the interactive, conversational level is yet to be developed. Therefore, it is the aim of this study to determine whether the success of the existing theory of experiential learning will bear the same results when adopted in Universiti Teknologi Mara Perlis BEL200 DIS 2A class as a learning strategy.

### **1.1.3 The Strengths of Role-play**

Coleman (1976) encompasses role plays, games and simulations, value exercises and socio-and psycho-drama as activities, which engage learners in concrete experiences which when processed lead to cognitive as well as attitudinal and behavioural change as the dimensions of experiential learning in classrooms. There are two major purposes for classroom role-plays: 1) the development of social interaction and problem-solving skills, and 2) the “acting out” of the curriculum. The acting and development in social interaction among peers is hoped to be able to help learners overcome their low self-concept and bridge in their communicative ability. Her view is shared with Dr. John Samuel in his article in the New Straits Times dated January, 5, 2002, which claims that the correct way to teach English is through

constant exposure to the spoken words, and sufficient opportunities provided for generating learners' communicative ability.

Larsen-Freeman (1986) explains, role-play whether structured or less structured is important because it gives learners an opportunity to practise communication in different social contexts and different social roles. The role-player is expected to feel, to converse, and to react as closely as possible to the role given to him. According to Livingstone (1985), in role-plays, learners need to monitor the speech of the person they are communicating with in order to be able to formulate appropriate responses and keeping ideas cohesive. Therefore, it is hoped that role-play, done in pairs or groups, which requires learners to negotiate on meaning during the discussion as well as during the presentation will give room to them to heighten self-concept and communicative competence. This is so because learners get to learn the language by experiencing the process in a naturalistic setting which resembles one's everyday routines and it keeps some students motivated, increases understanding and arouses enthusiasm for the elements of freedom and surprise it contains.

In experiential learning, the focus is more on the process (getting the message across) rather than knowledge of grammatical structures (Kirk, 1987). Dr John Samuel believes that:

Despite the formal grammar lessons I had in the primary and secondary schools, I cannot honestly say that they contributed to the proficiency in my English ... I would suggest teaching the proper spoken form of the language.

Subsequently, in the debriefing stage after a few plays, the researcher presumes that some students may say, 'I have never expected myself to be able to act like that, because I've always said that it is wrong to do that or I will never be able to do it. I now realize my newly found capability'. This realisation and awareness can be useful for students to gain in-depth introspection of themselves, which can

consequently improve themselves, leading to changed self-concept and also communicative competence.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

### **1.2.1 Low Self-concept and Resistance to Communication**

Many students are handicapped in the classroom by severe anxiety about communication or having lackadaisical attitude towards communication. Freimuth (1982) refers to education as a communication process whereby students must use speaking, listening and writing skills to receive instructions, clarify their understanding and demonstrate learning.

However, some students may be unwilling to participate and remain passive, or they may try to inhibit or embarrass other students who may want to learn during a particular session. Sometimes, they are asked to perform the task to the whole class and this evokes fear and anxiety among learners. These feelings of anxiety and fear may be due to lack of confidence and poor self-concept; factors that may cause lack of participation and null contribution to the learning process. Self-concept can be categorised into three ways. As viewed by Rosenberg (1979), these are: (a) how you view your competence/ability, (b) how you see yourself with others, and (c) how you feel when being with others. All these, individually or collectively, pose a barrier to the students and may affect their participation in the experiential learning process of role-play and hinder the development of oral competence.

There are several reasons why the students of UiTM may not participate in role-play activities and behave in this reticent manner. Although of homogenous cultural beliefs and practices, the socio-economic background that varies greatly among the students may make the students more conscious of their backgrounds and feel inadequate and inferior. Other factors may have also caused this lacking of confidence and low self-concept such as childhood experiences that do not enhance

positive self-concepts, lack of positive reinforcement, love and support from significant others (parents, teachers and friends) which lead to a feeling of incapability.

The majority of students in UiTM are aged 18 to 22 years old. At this range of age, they are very conscious of themselves not only in relation to the opposite sex but also to those of the same gender group. The transition between adolescence and adulthood may cause feelings of extreme shyness when participating in class or group tasks, thus affecting their self-concepts (Naginder Kaur, 1999).

Nevertheless, a general feeling of satisfaction which students get from successfully accomplishing a task leads to attainment value which in turn fulfils the needs of power, attention, achievement, and enhancement of a person's self-concept (Armstrong & Savage, 1998). It is thus important for teachers to help students realize how successful completion of tasks can improve their sense of personal power. Large and complex tasks can be reduced into smaller parts that appear less intimidating. The small part that each learner assumes in the experiential learning process of role-play can develop positive behaviours and optimism among learners if teacher provides constructive criticism and encourage learners to stay on task. By facilitating learning, teachers can inculcate positive self-concept among learners.

Because role play is particularly vulnerable to participant resistance due to dangers of anxiety, fear and guilt, (Jones, 1988), Ladousse (1987) claims that the said learning process takes place best when the atmosphere is free from tension, fear and anxiety. Students who work collaboratively stand to gain more as preferred and productive learning atmosphere is created. A learner's self-concept affects his or her motivation and level of participation in any experiential learning process.

### 1.2.2 Poor Oral Competence

An article 'Jobless grads must not be choosy' written by V.K.Chin in the New Straits Times dated Dec 22, 2002 reveals that there are 2 factors that contribute to thousands of graduates not being employed.

They lack the initiative, confidence and the ability to interact and communicate with others. Their lack of language skills and communicate properly are the reasons for their failure in landing a job.

His view was shared by Human Resources Minister, Datuk Wira Dr Fong Chan Onn, who expressed similar concern over graduates' failure to secure jobs and move up on the hierarchy of an organisation. The message was delivered during an English Language Campaign with the tagline 'English Language – Your Key to a Global Network' in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) on August 12, 2003.

Similar phenomenon occurs in UiTM Perlis. The majority of UiTM students have always been criticised by the lecturers as having problems to transmit their messages across orally. The evidence to such claims is the statistics below which shows how learners of BEL100, BEL200 and BEL250 of Semesters November 2001 to April 2002 and May 2002 to October 2002 in UiTM, Perlis fared in their speaking test.

Table 1.1: The Statistics of BEL100 Speaking Scores

Semester/ Scores	Poor 1-4	%	Fair 4.5-7.5	%	Excellent 8-10	%	Total
December 2001-April 2002	10	2.82	355	76.51	99	21.34	464
May 2002- October 2002	9	1.87	400	83.16	72	14.97	481

Source: The Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi Mara Perlis

Table 1.2: The Statistics of BEL200 Speaking Scores

Semes ter/ Scores	Very Poor 1-3	%	Poor 4-6	%	Fair 7-9	%	Good 10-12	%	Excel lent 13-15	%	Tota
Dec 2001- Apr 2002	10	1.23	107	13.13	370	45.39	245	30.06	85	10.18	817
May – Oct 2002	2	0.28	67	9.53	308	43.81	245	34.85	83	11.81	703

Source: The Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi Mara Perlis

Table 1.3: The Statistics of BEL250 Speaking Scores

Semes ter/ Scores	Very Poor 1-3	%	Poor 4-6	%	Fair 7-9	%	Good 10-12	%	Excel lent 13-15	%	Total
Nov 2001-Apr 2002	0	0	60	11.01	257	47.16	218	40	10	1.83	545
May – Oct 2002	2	0.29	39	5.69	235	34.31	357	52. 12	52	7.59	685

Source: The Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi Mara Perlis

The statistics above shows that most of the UiTM Perlis students are not competent enough when it comes to speaking. Very few of them have actually reached the stage of being excellent in communication. Most of them were clustered within the two bands: fair and good, far from being competent. A few lecturers commented that most of them who fared badly and fairly in the test were either not confident enough of themselves or they simply lacked the command of the language, which results in them scoring low in the three aspects looked into: task fulfilment, language and communicative ability. Their insufficient proficiency has somehow hindered their ability to put forth the message well.

### 1.2.3 Traditional Classroom Approach - Lacking in Learner Autonomy

In Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), role-play which used to be a favourite activity employed by lecturers in the Oral Communication component was regularly treated as a teacher-fronted practice as teachers tend to interfere with students' effort to generate the proper discourse or may even try to correct their pronunciation and enunciation. This meddling habit of the teacher can affect the students' confidence and affect their general participation. Errors that are committed; be they on the mechanics of role-play, grammatical competence, linguistic competence or strategic competence should be recollected and discussed after the practice stage that is during debrief, and the interaction during role-play practice should be the responsibility of the participants, without much teacher interference while they are speaking.

Dennison and Kirk (1990) oppose teacher intervention in experiential learning and contend that the teacher should only prompt the process and not control it. The teacher only needs to harness and refine the learning skills that students have already acquired and gauge their interest in learning by getting them to play the roles agreed on.

Bragger (1985) proposes that teachers must modify their traditional ways of interacting with students in providing a classroom environment that is conducive for language use in the world. Otherwise, the classroom will remain the same and not much learning will take place. Jones (1987) refers to it as:

Learning...and the learning will be placed in jeopardy by interference. The learning is not just the learning of facts; it is behavioural and concerns power and responsibility and should not be diminished. (p.68)

Dennison and Kirk (1990) make a clear distinction between pedagogy and andragogy in explaining student motivation and interest in accomplishing the task. In pedagogical situations, the teacher plays a more significant role; more of the input provider, while in andragogy, his or her role is more limited to the facilitation and

monitoring of activities. The more self-directed students can demonstrate maturity by analysing their own needs and deciding what can be done to fulfil them resulting in a learner-centred approach.

In addition, how the aspects of communicative competence are taught should also be of concern. Allwright (1979) postulates that teaching comprehensively for linguistic competence will necessarily leave a large area of communicative competence untouched, whereas teaching all relevant aspects equally comprehensive will necessarily cater for all but a small part of linguistic competence. Therefore, it can be implied that he proposes the teaching of integration of competence and content as learners are required to perform tasks, which incorporate various needs and abilities in the real world later.

Gaies (1985) asserts that an improvement in self-concept and self-direction is one of the most acclaimed benefits of peer involvement in language learning. The learners learn from one another and the process of interaction and negotiation that takes place without teacher intervention may lower their fear and anxiety, and benefit their oral competence.

### **1.3 Rationale of the Study**

The study is thought feasible to be conducted as the implementation of role-play in ESL classes has been of little practice for the past few years despite the urge for more learner-centred activities. A few comments obtained through researches reveal that lack of preference for role-play is due to lack of favourability among education practitioners for it and its ineffectiveness, which lacks reality. Furthermore, it is losing out to other more interesting activities, which are thought more effective.

On the other hand, a few senior lecturers of Universiti Teknologi Mara, Shah Alam when interviewed assert that the lack of adoption of role-play is not because of its unpopularity but more of its nature as a methodology. Furthermore, most of the



lecturers are geared towards preparing students for examinations, and those examinations no longer require role-play as one of their test items. However, they claim that they used to carry out role-play as a teaching approach when it was included as part of the syllabus and it was proved that role-play did help in reinforcing students to speak and improving their speaking proficiency. No doubt, it had always been effective and they have no refutation against the inculcation of role-play as a medium to improve students' oral competence. Furthermore, when the needs arise they do have role-play to complement other speaking activities carried out in class.

In addition, the role-play, which will be carried out is in the form of experiential learning, which has proved to be successful in earlier studies, in getting students to experience 'doing something' rather than just thinking. The learning process will encompass 4 phases which when integrated will result in learners feeling more motivated and facilitate subsequent learning.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to examine:

- a) the effects of role-play on self-concept and communicative competence.
- b) the correlation between the effects on learners' self-concept and communicative competence after using role-play as the learning process.

In this study, the experiential learning process of role-play, which gives autonomy to learners, is the learning platform for students. Therefore, this study will investigate whether the opportunity to learn through the experiential learning and learner-centred process weekly (continually) can enhance the self-concept and communicative skills of the students. Self-concept is a very powerful predictor of academic performance than more general perceptions of academic competence according to many authors (Pajares, 1996; Pajares & Miller, 1994; Pajares, Miller & Johnson, 1999). The idea behind the use of role-play as a pedagogical tool relies on

the fact that experience is the best teacher. If a real life experience is difficult or impossible, then an artificial environment, though not ideal, may be effective for learning (Fablusi, 2000). Furthermore, when past experiences can be applied directly to current experience, learning is facilitated (Brundage & Mackeracher, 1980).

The correlation between the effects that might take place between the two dependent variables will be determined from the quantitative assessments made during speaking tests, and Multi-dimensional Self-concept tests. Shavelson et al. (1976) postulate that self-concept in general terms, represents perceptions of self as derived for self-acknowledgement, interaction with significant others and other experiential aspects of the social environment (Byrne, 1996). Savignon (1978) asserts that role-play, discussion topics and games all represent strategies for providing the emotional involvement necessary for authentic communication in the classroom.

It is important that students develop a positive self-concept and enhance their communicative competence, as this will enable them to feel a sense of personal power and control, which give them more confidence to take charge of their own learning, because, otherwise, as Thatcher (1990) states:

Poor self-image is a powerful block to learning and a very powerful block to clear communication, and it is also a very persistent block, which is difficult to remove once it has developed.

## **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

For this study, the objectives are:

1. to determine the effects of using experiential form of role-play as a learning process on self-concept.
2. to determine the effects of using experiential form of role-play as a learning process on communicative competence.

3. to determine whether there is correlation between the effects on self-concept and the effects on communicative competence after using experiential form of role-play as a learning process.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

This research addresses the following research questions:

1. Does using experiential form of role-play as a learning process improve students' self-concept?
2. Does using experiential form role-play as a learning process improve students' communicative (oral) competence?
3. Do the effects on self-concept correlate with the effects on communicative competence?

## **1.7 Null Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses will be tested:

- Ho1. There is no significant difference in self-concept between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the experiential learning form of role-play when performing the group task and are assessed by the lecturer.
- Ho2. There is no significant difference in self-concept between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the experiential learning form of role-play when performing the group task and are assessed by the lecturer.

- Ho3. There is no significant difference in self-concept between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the experiential learning form of role-play and assess own self-concept using the Multi-dimensional Test of Self-concept (MTS).
- Ho4. There is no significant difference in self-concept between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the traditional teacher-fronted approach when performing the individual task and are assessed by the lecturer.
- Ho5. There is no significant difference in self-concept between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the traditional teacher-fronted approach when performing the group task and are assessed by the lecturer.
- Ho6. There is no significant difference in self-concept between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the traditional teacher-fronted approach and assess their own self-concept using the MTS.
- Ho7. There is no significant difference in communicative (oral) competence between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the experiential learning form of role-play when performing the individual task.
- Ho8. There is no significant difference in communicative (oral) competence between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the experiential learning form of role-play when performing the group task.
- Ho9. There is no significant difference in communicative (oral) competence between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the traditional teacher-fronted approach when performing the individual task.

- Ho10. There is no significant difference in communicative (oral) competence between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the traditional teacher-fronted approach when performing the group task.
- Ho11. The relative difference in self-concept among those who are exposed to role-play has no significant difference from the relative difference among those who are exposed to traditional teacher-fronted approach when performing the individual task and are assessed by the lecturer.
- Ho12. The relative difference in self-concept among those who are exposed to role-play has no significant difference from the relative difference among those who are exposed to traditional teacher-fronted approach when performing the group task and are assessed by the lecturer.
- Ho13. The relative difference in self-concept among those who are exposed to role-play has no significant difference from the relative difference among those who are exposed to traditional teacher-fronted approach when they assess own self-concept using the MTS.
- Ho14. The relative difference in communicative (oral) competence among those who are exposed to role-play has no significant difference from the relative change among those who are exposed to traditional teacher-fronted approach when performing the individual task.
- Ho15. The relative difference in communicative (oral) competence among those who are exposed to role-play has no significant difference from the relative

difference among those who are exposed to traditional teacher-fronted approach when performing the group task.

- Ho16. There is no significant correlation between the difference in self-concept and the difference in oral competence for those who undergo the experiential learning form of role-play when performing the individual task and are assessed by the lecturer.
- Ho17. There is no significant correlation between the difference in self-concept and the difference in oral competence for those who undergo the experiential learning form of role-play when performing the individual task and assess their own self-concept using the MTS.
- Ho18. There is no significant correlation between the difference in self-concept and the difference in oral competence for those who undergo the experiential learning form of role-play when performing the group task and are assessed by the lecturer.
- Ho19. There is no significant correlation between the difference in self-concept and the difference in oral competence for those who undergo the experiential learning form of role-play when performing the group task and assess their own self-concept using the MTS.

## **1.8 Significance of the Study**

The two key terms in discussion 'experiential learning' and 'role-play' may not be new to education practitioners, yet some lights still need to be shed as to how these two if merged may turn out to be a superb approach in enhancing one's belief

of himself and also language proficiency. More specifically, teachers and educators will be made aware of the factors that contribute to students' reluctance in participating in classroom interactive activities. If before, they have always found the students at fault for being reserved and not taking part in such activities, now they will be able to plan, design and vary activities, which appeal to the students and make them feel appreciated. The findings of this study will enable them to see whether the adoption of experiential form of role-play as a learning strategy will make students more enthusiastic in learning and improve their oral skills.

This study is hoped to reveal to teachers, especially UiTM Perlis English Language lecturers that classroom activities need to be tailored to engaging more lively and creative activities, which will require a lot of usage of English on the students' part. Quoting Tan Teng Yang on his letter to the Editor, published on May 15, 2002:

English needs a lot of daily usage for one to be proficient. There is no shortcut, only practice, practice and practice. ... Make it interesting and useful for everyday life.

A theory of language learning by Krashen (1982) relates the Affective Filter Hypothesis (such as motivation, anxiety, personality and attitude) to second language acquisition. He claims that learner will normally be able to acquire language when they have motivation, self-confidence and low anxiety level. The presence of these positive factors will help raise the low affective filters and at the same time give room for input to pass through thus gear learners to use the language effectively and meaningfully in their communication.

This is also in line with the aims of the implementation of English Language Programme for the upper secondary school level of the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools or Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (KBSM) (2002), which states that:

... so as to equip them with the skills and knowledge of English to communicate in certain everyday activities and certain job situations; and also to provide points of take-off for various post secondary school needs.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will suggest the need to reinforce the use of experiential form of role-play in classroom, which provides opportunities for group work that can lead to the enhancement in interaction and social skills.

## **1.9 Limitations of the Study**

The study has its limitations.

1. The definition of self-concept is wide and various in number. However, this study focuses only on three facets of self-concept, which have implications and relationship to students' participation in the experiential learning process of role-play.
2. Experiential learning is also a wide area to explore and comprises many types of learning experiences such as problem-solving tasks, outdoor/field activities, internships and community-based projects. However, for this particular study, emphasis is only placed on the experiential learning process of role-play carried out in classrooms resulting in lacking of analysis done on the other processes of experiential learning, which the students experience.
3. The misinterpretation of the term role-play by respondents, which is thought to be mainly acting and performing in front of the audience.
4. The personality of the lecturers handling the experimental and control groups may either pose limitations to the study or enhance the theory proposed.
5. The approach currently employed by the lecturers might have helped or hampered the processes that were supposed to transpire.
6. Physical constraint; the use of only one recorder, which was placed on the table in front of the candidates, hampered the audibility of the recording and made it impossible for detailed transcription to be done.



7. Learners and lessons were observed only 2 hours weekly. Therefore, the researcher is not aware of the processes that took place during other lessons.
8. Only 59 subjects were observed for this study. Hence, the outcomes may not be generalised to all UiTM students and ESL learners in the Malaysian context.

### 1.10 Definitions of Terms

Listed below are the definitions of the key terms as used in this study.

- Role-play: a situation whereby a student is given a 'part' to enact. He may enact someone other than himself or he may play his own role in a specific context.
- Experiential learning: Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning, which has four stages of cycle, *Experience, Reflect, Conceptualise, and Apply*. In the practice of role-play, these four stages may overlap and occur interchangeably.
- Communicative competence: the ability to function in a communicative setting; an oral transaction involving one or more persons by using language effectively to convey messages; saying the right things in the right place, at the right time; with more focus on meaning rather than form.
- Grammatical Competence: the knowledge of appropriate grammar i.e. tenses, subject-verb agreement and verb form and the use of them in verbal transactions
- Linguistic Competence: the knowledge of sounds and sentences and understanding meanings of words and the use of them; sociocultural: the ways utterances are produced and understood – the style, register

and intonation and discourse: the combination of utterances which are cohesive in form and coherent in thought

- ❑ Strategic competence: the knowledge and use of nonverbal communication strategies i.e. gestures to compensate for unknown language and fluency in delivery
- ❑ Self-concept: how the students see themselves, regard themselves with regards to their language proficiency, how they would like to be perceived by others, and what they think their peers think of them. This concept covers three facets, which are the focus of the study, i.e., Verbal/Academic Self-Concept, Emotional Self-Concept and Social Self-Concept
- ❑ Verbal/Academic Self-Concept: the students' perceptions of their competence in English as well as their achievements in the language; the need for achievement
- ❑ Emotional Self-Concept: the particular emotional states of the mind during or after the role-play sessions, which may be caused by external variables such as anxiety, depression and other emotional disturbances
- ❑ Social Self-Concept: the relationship of the participants with their peers and those around them and how much at ease they feel with one another and accommodate each other

### **1.11 Summary**

In brief, the criticisms thrown on graduates on their incapability to conduct themselves in English orally has drawn the attention of many people. A remedy should be taken. In UiTM Perlis, learners who are resistant and unwilling to participate during the occasional implementation of interactive activities attribute such

phenomenon to several reasons and extraneous variables. Therefore, this study is proposing a mode of teaching; experiential learning form of role-play to see whether it can help boost students' beliefs and perceptions of themselves aside from improving communicative competence.